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ABSTRACT

In 1985, in response to a sharp decline in student enrollment in vocational programs, especially in forestry and drafting technologies, Chemeketa Community College (CCC) (Oregon) adopted a carefully targeted marketing technique involving the use of a sales representative to approach prospective students directly. A temporary part-time position of sales representative was approved, with the following duties and responsibilities: (1) become familiar with all vocational programs assigned to Trades & Technologies at CCC; (2) develop a marketing plan to meet the unique needs of each program coordinator; (3) implement the marketing plan and provide weekly reports to the coordinators and the director on contacts and results; (4) coordinate the implementation of a vocational contact checklist, a form to be completed by high school principals and superintendents indicating the presentations and materials desired from the college; (5) work with college students assigned to high school recruitment; and (6) submit an evaluation of recruitment results for review and action. During the 6 months of the recruitment effort, larger high schools in and out of the Salem area were targeted to receive the vocational contact checklist and to be visited by the sales representative. Results of the effort revealed the value of the high school teacher as contact person, of attending career fair or career days at the high school, of meeting with students outside of the classroom atmosphere, and of using a multi-media approach. (UCM)

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A Sales Representative -- One Marketing Technique

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For a number of years, business and industry have recognized the value of marketing and the reliance on well-qualified sales representatives for their products and services. Education, on the the other hand, until recently, has been reluctant to adopt marketing concepts, strategies and techniques from business and industry. Generally the belief has existed that marketing involves sales, one-way communication and the notion of "hawking one's wares". Certainly, a case can be made for a distinction between marketing commercial products and marketing educational opportunities. However, for many educational institutions, a greater case can be made that marketing is no longer a luxury or something distasteful. But, in reality, it is a basic necessity for survival -- particularly for the community college which is so close to the work place where technology is rapidly changing.

Needing To Be More Business- Oriented. Fewer high school graduates, a fast-moving society rendering many curricula obsolete, high instructional costs, a sluggish economy striving to make the transition from an industrial to a service orientation, high unemployment in many economic and geographical sectors, failure at the ballot box on educational initiatives and a lower level

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of prestige for education all argue well the case for adopting a more business like demeanor, specifically using marketing concepts, strategies and techniques to interact with prospective students. A marketing plan may include market research, a variety of strategies, techniques and carefully chosen targets plus an evaluation of the marketing results or effectiveness. But, as a concept, the marketing plan may be thought of as getting information on educational programs and services to the right people at the right time so that they can make better decisions. As a concept, educational marketing assumes a need to seek rather than wait and that two-way communication serves both the institution and the prospective student well. Also, the concept assumes, having quality programs and services, opportunities do exist for identifying and expanding the pool of prospective students -- and, that it is essential to seize the opportunities, so that we continue to serve the needs of students and society.

Adopting One Marketing Technique. Similar to other educational institutions, Chemeketa Community College, regularly uses direct mail approaches, updates and disseminates college publications such as the catalog, class schedules and program brochures, values students and alumni as recruiters and participates in a broad, multi-level range of activities from the state and local fairs to hosting groups for on-campus orientations. All of these efforts contribute to the total marketing effort. However, with a sharp decline in student enrollment in vocational programs, especially in the areas of forestry and drafting technologies it seemed very appropriate to consider using a carefully targeted approach and a clearly focused technique to go directly to prospective students.

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After considerable faculty and staff discussion fall quarter of 1985, a recommendation was made to the college's enrollment management committee and the administration that one promising marketing, technique would be the use of a "sales representative" for the vocational programs. The idea of a representative was approved as a temporary position starting January, 1986 through June, 1986, with one-half day on campus and one day per week off campus or 12 hours in combination weekly.

The job description for the position stressed the following minimum qualifications:
(1) demonstrated evidence of background in sales and product promotion in business and/or industry, (2) a background in public relations and/or recruitment in either the public or the private sector, (3) an understanding and commitment to vocational training at the community college level. For duties and responsibilities, the sales representative would be required to:

. become familiar with all vocational programs assigned to Trades & Technologies at Chemeketa Community College;

. develop in consultation with the program coordinators a marketing plan to meet the unique needs of each program coordinator;

. implement the marketing plan and provide weekly reports to the coordinators and the director on the contacts and the results accomplished;

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- coordinate the implementation of the vocational contact checklist (this is a form sent to all principals and superintendents of high schools in the college's district requesting their assistance in the kinds of presentation and materials they want from the college);

- work with college students assigned to high school recruitment; and,
- submit an evaluation of the place(s) and the results of recruiting for review and action by the director and the coordinators.

As a result of the job announcement for the position, several persons were considered for the temporary job. But, of all the candidates, the individual who possessed the best credentials was someone already employed part-time as a clerical assistant/receptionist in the college's counseling department. Not only was the person knowledgeable about vocational offerings, the individual had completed an associate degree in electronics and had been employed as an automotive salesperson and as a lift-truck mechanic. The combination of work experience and familiarity with vocational curricula matched the job needs quite well.

Starting in January of 1986, the sales representative met with the director and coordinators to identify strategies for going directly to high school students. There was agreement to target the larger high schools outside of Salem, the

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location of the college's main campus. And, secondly to target the high schools in the Salem area -- on the assumption that high schools close by receive relatively more information and have more day-to-day contact with the college than schools outside the immediate area.

Profiting From The Effort. All thirty-two public high schools in the district plus the private schools were mailed the vocational contact checklist. The checklist served as one method for assessing the need for information about vocational programs. From January through June 1986, and high schools were personally visited -- the sales representative averaged two visitations weekly.

In late June of 1986, a final evaluation was made of the results of the sales representative. We found the vocational contact checklist was not a "doorbuster" -- only 13 of the 32 principals and superintendents responded. However, for the thirteen respondents, it proved a valuable tool which should be considered for use again. The strategy to set targets and priorities proved quite valuable, especially the commitment to involve currently enrolled students in the activities to represent the college.

We found the most valuable contact at the high school was the teacher, working directly with the counterpart at the college. It was important to participate in any sort of career fair or career day at the high schools. The students were more responsive outside of the classroom atmosphere. They were coming on their own initiative to the college staff and, consequently, they showed more interest. We found rather than use a set, single media technique, there's more value in using a variety of materials such as slides, written materials, videos and demonstration set-ups.

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Overall, the pilot project demonstrated there's a genuine value to reaching out to prospective students rather than waiting for them to discover on their own the offerings available. Two-way communication produced many new ideas for articulation between the college and the secondary schools. And, the careful focus on the specific targets of increasing enrollment in forestry and drafting has resulted in more students enrolling at the college. Clearly, it seems the use of a sales representative proved advantageous for communicating the programs and services available. The business-like technique was well-received by the high schools, parents and, foremost, by the prospective students.

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